

# Salmonellosis

## Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease  
Control and Prevention

An Office of the  
Department of Health and Human Services

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### What is Salmonellosis?

Salmonellosis is an illness caused by a group of bacteria called *Salmonella*. There are over 2,000 different types of *Salmonella* and the bacteria can cause disease in both humans and animals. *Salmonella* is a major cause of gastrointestinal (stomach and intestines) illness in the United States.

### What are the signs and symptoms of Salmonellosis?

Symptoms of salmonellosis usually appear between 6 and 72 hours after swallowing the bacteria. The most common signs of illness are:

- Diarrhea
- Stomach cramps
- Fever
- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting (sometimes)

The illness usually lasts 5 to 7 days, and most people recover without treatment. In some people the bacteria may move from the intestines into the blood or other body sites and cause more severe illness. The elderly, infants, and people with weakened ability to fight off germs are more likely to have severe illness.

Some people with salmonellosis may not look or feel sick, but may still shed the bacteria in their stools and pass the bacteria to others.

### How is Salmonellosis spread?

*Salmonella* bacteria must be swallowed to cause disease. Usually this happens when someone eats food that has been contaminated with the bacteria and has not been properly handled, prepared or cooked.

The illness may spread from person to person if people do not wash their hands well with soap and water after using the toilet, changing diapers, or touching animals or reptiles. People who get the bacteria on their hands can spread it to anyone or anything they touch, especially food, which can then make others sick if the food is not cooked well enough to kill the germs.

*Salmonella* may be spread from person to person in places where hygiene may be poor.

### What types of food are commonly linked with Salmonellosis?

*Salmonella* is commonly found in uncooked food products from farm animals. Examples include eggs, egg products, meat, meat products, poultry, milk and dairy products. In recent years, contaminated fruits and vegetables have been increasingly recognized as the source of outbreaks of salmonellosis. *Salmonella* can be in any type of food if the bacteria get on the food at any time between processing, cooking, and eating. For example, a food handler with salmonellosis may get the bacteria on the food if his or her hands are not washed well before preparing food. Thorough cooking (cooking well done) and processing will kill the bacteria and make food safe to eat.

### What are some non-food sources of Salmonella?

*Salmonella* have been found in the stools (feces) of both sick and apparently healthy people and animals. Many domestic animals, including dogs and cats, pet turtles, reptiles, chicks, poultry, cattle and swine, can carry the bacteria. Reptiles are particularly likely to carry *Salmonella* and people should always wash their hands immediately after contact with reptiles. Animals might not show signs of being infected, but may still pass germs to people.

### How is Salmonellosis treated?

Most people who are otherwise healthy recover without treatment. In healthy people, treatment with antibiotics may cause them to shed the bacteria in their stools for a longer period of time and increase the risk of passing *Salmonella* to others.

Treatment with antibiotics may be given to patients if infection spreads from the intestines to other parts of the body. Antibiotics may also be given to people such as infants and the elderly who may not be able to fight off the infection on their own.

It is important for all people with diarrhea to drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

### **How can you know for sure if you have Salmonellosis?**

Your healthcare provider may ask you for a sample of your stool so the laboratory can test it to see if they find *Salmonella*. It takes the lab several days to do this test.

### **How can Salmonellosis be prevented?**

You can prevent salmonellosis and other diseases by following the guidelines below:

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water
  - Before eating or preparing food
  - After using the toilet
  - After changing diapers
  - After touching pets or other animals (especially reptiles)
- Thoroughly cook all food products from animals, especially poultry and eggs.
- Do not eat raw or cracked eggs, unpasteurized milk or any other dairy product made with raw unpasteurized milk.
- Keep foods that will be eaten raw, such as fruits and vegetables, away from food products from animals. For example, wash your hands, utensils, and work surfaces that have been in contact with raw poultry before you make a salad.
- If you are caring for a person with salmonellosis or diarrhea, wash your hands well after contact with the person's stool. For example, after changing diapers, be sure to clean changing area well and wash hands carefully.
- Avoid letting infants or young children come into contact with reptiles, such as turtles or iguanas. If they do, make sure to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water. Reptiles (including turtles) are not appropriate pets for small children and should not be in the same house as an infant.
- If you have a child in daycare who has salmonellosis or diarrhea, let the daycare provider know so they can take extra measures to prevent spread of illness. Children with diarrhea should stay out of daycare until their diarrhea resolves. The daycare provider should contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) for

information on how to prevent spread of salmonellosis in the day care.

- Contact your healthcare provider whenever you experience diarrhea for a long period of time.

### **Are there any restrictions for people with Salmonellosis?**

Yes. The Maine CDC will determine which restrictions apply in a specific situation. An infected food handler, child care worker or health care worker needs to stay out of work while ill. Contact Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821 for specific information.

### **Salmonellosis in Maine**

Salmonellosis is fairly common in Maine. Most cases occur between April and October.

The Maine CDC investigates all reported cases of salmonellosis to identify sources of public health concern and to prevent further spread of the disease. If cases occur in a facility, the Maine CDC may need to work with the people involved with the facility to improve hand washing and cleaning. If many cases occur at the same time, it may mean that a restaurant, food or water supply has a problem that needs to be fixed.

### **Where can I get more information?**

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting the website <http://www.mainepublichealth.gov>. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov/salmonella> - is another excellent source of health information.